

**HHMI-NIBIB INTERFACES INITIATIVE  
For Interdisciplinary Graduate Research Training**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**BIG PICTURE**

**1. How involved will NIBIB staff be in Phase I and HHMI staff in Phase II?**

Staff from HHMI and NIBIB will be actively involved in both phases of this initiative, participating in meetings of the leadership teams, joint site visits, assessment of program progress, and long-term evaluation.

**2. Will this initiative be offered in subsequent years?**

If 10 proposals deemed to be fundable are not received in this round of Phase I competition, we will have a second Phase I competition next year. If we receive many more than 10 competitive applications this year (as we expect), any future competition will depend on the success of this program and the unmet needs in graduate science education in the future.

**3. What do you expect the funding rate to be for Phase I?**

It is impossible to predict the funding rate, because it depends on the number of completed applications we receive. We plan to fund a total of 10 programs in Phase I.

**4. The first two years of graduate training of any proposed new program will include interdisciplinary coursework, but how can students' training be prevented from becoming more narrowly defined and less interdisciplinary once they enter a thesis lab?**

We expect the faculty to provide an interdisciplinary research environment throughout the graduate training, especially during the lab-based part of the program. Participation in interdisciplinary research during a student's entire Ph.D. experience is an important aspect of this program. If appropriate, Phase I funds may be budgeted to recruit new interdisciplinary scientists who would provide vibrant interdisciplinary research labs where students could carry out their thesis research.

**5. Do you expect the training program to be longer than traditional graduate training programs?**

We hope the training provided through these new programs is a different type of training, not additional training.

**6. After the end of Phases I and II, will the programs be folded into the traditional NIH Institutional Training Grant (T32) application process?**

That is what we anticipate. We expect the eight years of funding through the HHMI-NIBIB Interfaces Initiative to significantly enhance the potential for a successful NIH T32 application.

**INSTITUTIONAL ELIGIBILITY**

**7. Are foreign institutions eligible to apply or to be collaborating institutions?**

No. Although we recognize the value of collaborations with foreign institutions, this initiative is targeted to U.S. institutions only. Applicants and collaborating institutions must be in the United States.

**8. Are master's level programs or undergraduate programs eligible for support?**

No. We recognize the importance of strong interdisciplinary training at the master's and undergraduate levels. However, this initiative focuses on predoctoral training for several reasons, one of which is that the NIH National Research Service Award (NRSA) (the funding mechanism we are using for Phase II and emulating in Phase I) stipulates that NRSA-supported students must be enrolled in a Ph.D. program. In addition, HHMI already awards grants to biomedical research institutions, universities, and colleges to support innovative science education programs (many of which are interdisciplinary) at the pre-kindergarten to 12th-grade and undergraduate levels. NIBIB also participates in programs targeting undergraduates and early graduate students. See the NIBIB website for more details (<http://www.nibib.nih.gov/training/training.html>).

**9. Are multi-institution collaborations eligible to apply?**

Yes. We think that in many cases collaboration among institutions will be very effective. However, the application must designate one institution as primary. That institution will be the one to which HHMI will provide grant funds for Phase I. The primary institution must then disperse funds appropriately to the collaborating institution(s). In addition, the program director at the primary institution is responsible for collecting data, submitting progress reports and financial reports on behalf of the collaborating institutions, and submitting the Phase II application.

**10. Are institutions with potentially overlapping external funding (e.g., a K07 curriculum development award funded from the NIH Roadmap) eligible to apply? Will applying for this grant exclude an institution from applying for other similar grants?**

If the funds awarded by other organizations are modest, then the institution is still eligible to apply. If the funds are substantial and overlap significantly, eligibility might be an issue. These cases will be evaluated individually and potential applicants should contact HHMI or NIBIB before submitting an application. You are not eligible if you already have a T32 grant supporting the program activities in your application. In addition, NIH does not allow the same application to be under review by two different NIH institutes or centers simultaneously.

**11. Are proposals other than those targeting imaging or bioengineering responsive to this initiative? For example, can we propose developing a program that brings together only chemistry, physics, and biology?**

Yes. Programs eligible for funding must integrate the biological sciences with the physical science, computational, engineering, or mathematical disciplines. There is no requirement or preference for any specific field or training topic.

**12. Do HHMI and NIBIB have a preference with respect to the scope of the program? For example, would an application proposing creation of a single new interdisciplinary graduate program (e.g., neuroengineering) be more or less competitive than an application for a larger, more ambitious plan to develop the administrative, teaching, and research infrastructure required for a select number of new interdisciplinary graduate programs?**

We suggest that you propose activities that fit your institution's needs and resources best. However, proposals must be responsive to the six areas of core program development, and only 10% of the budget can go for program administration. If too much of the focus is on one development area, the application will not be as strong as one with more equal focus across several development areas.

**13. Should the scientific focus of the proposed program provide training that can be applied broadly throughout biological systems, or should the focus be narrower?**

We do not have a preference and we anticipate that the portfolio of funded grants will have both types of programs. We suggest that you consider the scientific expertise at your institution and propose a program

that best fits that expertise. The program most likely to be successful at your institution will have the best chance for success in the review.

**14. Will this program support M.D./Ph.D. programs that are interdisciplinary?**

As designed, this program is not intended to support dual-degree (e.g., M.D./Ph.D.) training. There are specific NIH programs that support M.D./Ph.D. training, such as the NIGMS Medical Student Training Program (MSTP) and the NIH F30 fellowship program. However, the program can be used to develop the Ph.D. portion of an M.D./Ph.D. program. It must fulfill all the other requirements and cannot be used to support medical education.

**GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT**

**15. Will this initiative support foreign graduate students?**

During Phase I (the HHMI-funded phase) foreign graduate students may be supported. However, during Phase II, these students must be funded through a different mechanism, such as an R01 grant or institutional funds. NRSA regulations do not permit appointment of individuals who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents to the Phase II (NIBIB-funded) grant.

**16. The HHMI-NIBIB Interfaces program announcement states that “It is expected that few, if any, graduate students will be supported in Phase I of the initiative.” Does that mean that a proposal that asks for funds to support graduate students in Phase I will be noncompetitive?**

No. It is acceptable and appropriate in many cases to budget for students in Phase I. In fact, we expect that by year 3 of Phase I, many programs will be supporting graduate students, if only to test new program aspects. However, keep in mind that the Phase II award will primarily support graduate students. One of the benefits of the HHMI-NIBIB partnership is that HHMI has the ability to fund infrastructure development during Phase I. We hope that applicants take advantage of the increased flexibility in funding that is possible because of this unique partnership.

In addition, each Phase I application will be evaluated on the basis of responsiveness to six areas for program development:

- Program Leadership
- Curriculum and Educational Resources
- Faculty
- Graduate Students
- Program Administration
- Program Assessment

Proposals that focus on graduate students or on another single program development area might not be reviewed as favorably as those that address several areas. If your institution's efforts in all other program development areas are already well developed and all you are asking for is graduate student support, your institution might want to consider applying for an NIH T32 Institutional Training Grant.

**17. According to the Phase I program announcement, the institution's graduate student track record is considered in the evaluation process. However, these programs have not yet been developed. How can you expect a strong track record of supporting competitive graduate students if the programs have not even started admitting students?**

What we will be looking for is the institution's ability to attract competitive graduate students in relevant fields and departments and the history of the institution's commitment to support newly established programs after external support has been exhausted. We also will be looking at the institution's ability and plan to recruit and retain individuals from groups underrepresented in the sciences.

## **BUDGET**

### **18. What will a typical budget look like for Phase I?**

We do not expect that there will be a “typical” budget. The budget of each institution will reflect the resources already available and the focus of the institutional commitment at that institution. For example, many institutions already have space for educational activities but need funds to support a new interdisciplinary faculty member who will be key to the educational effort. Other institutions already have faculty who are doing interdisciplinary research in several relevant departments, and they need to focus on developing and initiating a new graduate program curriculum.

### **19. Is there a requirement for matching institutional funds?**

No, there is no formal requirement for matching funds in either Phase I or Phase II. However, the level of institutional commitment is a major factor in the evaluation for Phase I and Phase II. We expect that the new successful programs created as a result of this initiative will be institutionalized. Therefore, we expect that the proposal will provide evidence that the institution is committed to substantial support of the proposed program.

### **20. Will Phase II be limited to 10 student slots?**

During Phase II, a maximum of 10 trainees can be supported at any given time on the training grant award. Typically, NRSA regulations require a full-time appointment for a trainee for at least one year. See the NRSA regulations for more details ([http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps\\_2003/NIHGPS\\_Part10.htm#\\_Toc54600187](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps_2003/NIHGPS_Part10.htm#_Toc54600187)), or contact NIBIB Training Program staff (<http://www.nibib.nih.gov/about/directory/staffdirectory.html>).

Although there is a maximum of 10 slots funded by NIBIB, an institution can supplement the stipends with nonfederal funds or find another source of funds to support more students in the program. It is advisable to start small and expand the program over time. Institutional funds may also be used to support students. The program should not be funded and supported solely by HHMI and NIBIB because eventually the programs should be institutionalized.

### **21. Will Phase II support from NIBIB have a capped budget?**

No. The amount of Phase II support will depend on the number of slots requested by the applicant and other factors like tuition costs. According to NIH policy, NIH pays 100% up to \$3,000 in tuition and 60% of remaining tuition costs. All stipend amounts are set at the publicized NRSA level for a given fiscal year. Any grant that requests more than \$500,000 in direct costs in any given budget year must have advance permission to submit. At the time of the Phase II competition, applicants should contact NIBIB staff to complete the necessary paperwork.

## **APPLICATION LOGISTICS**

### **22. How does the presidential designation work for Phase I?**

For any institution where more than two groups have registered their intent to apply, we will notify the university president via e-mail and give the president several weeks to identify which of the two groups may go forward with the full application for funding. Once we have heard from the institution, we will contact the designated group and allow it to submit a full application. Registrants not designated will be informed that they will not be allowed to complete the application.

**23. For Phase I, can we submit more than 10 CVs if we have more than 10 faculty members involved with the program?**

The HHMI competition system requires that you designate all members of the leadership team along with relevant faculty and their specific roles in the program. You also should describe the expertise and relevance of faculty members and their value to the program in the proposal narrative. The CVs from the program leadership are collected in a section separate from the faculty. For faculty, our intention is to collect CVs only from the core faculty involved in the program. If you have more than 10 core faculty members, please choose the 10 CVs that are most representative of the faculty and that will communicate the strength of their scientific and educational expertise sufficiently.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

**24. Please provide more details about the Phase I review process.**

The review team will be assembled from potential reviewers suggested by HHMI and NIBIB. Ideally, the reviewers on the Phase I panel will represent the various disciplines and fields equally. We anticipate good representation from the biomedical science community as well as the engineering and physical science communities. In addition, we will choose reviewers who are committed to identifying new and innovative training models. Our reviewers will be instructed to think “outside the box,” as we have instructed applicants to do. It will be made clear that we value innovation and creativity more highly than traditional approaches.

**25. Please provide more details about the Phase II review process especially in light of the fact that experimental graduate programs are not normally proposed in a typical T32 grant.**

Our goal is to have substantial continuity of reviewers between the Phase I and Phase II reviews. We anticipate that the review criteria will be based on the standard T32 criteria (see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-02-109.html>) but will also take into consideration responsiveness to the six core areas for program development discussed in the Phase I program announcement. These reviewers will understand that programs will not be fully developed in three years (i.e., the end of Phase I) and that the partnership between HHMI and NIBIB was designed to sustain the program throughout the eight-year period needed to institutionalize such a training program.